

Bhagat Singh : Revolutionary with a Difference

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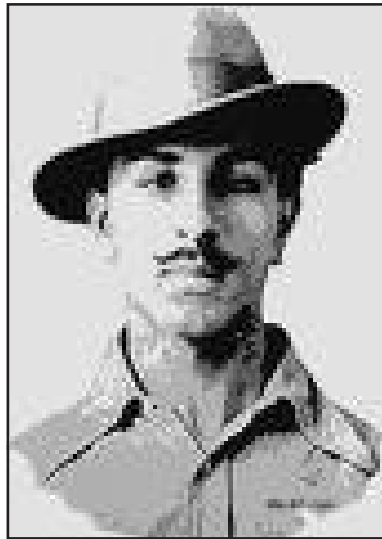
If Gandhi and Subhas deserve a bust in the remote corridors of human consciousness then there must be a room for an effigy of Bhagat Singh. The revolutionaries made an abiding contribution to the struggle for Independence of India. They made supreme sacrifices. They helped in spreading national consciousness among the people. The slogan of "Inquilab Zindabad" by Bhagat Singh still echoes in the minds of freedom loving people of our country.

The revolutionaries discovered their fount of inspiration in the 'trio' of the Congress - B.G. Tilak, B.C. Pal and Lala Lajpat Rai. Almost all the revolutionary groups joined the Congress while maintaining and endeavouring to strengthen their secret organization. Many of their leaders obtained responsible positions in district congress committees and used their positions to consolidate their followers. This penetration of the congress had a very important consequence for it helped the revolutionaries internally in the matter of recruitment and organization, and externally in the matter of public sympathy.

During 1920-22 no major extremist activities were planned. Early in 1922 the failure of the Non-Cooperation movement led to the

controversy over the means-non-violent or violent to be employed. The revolutionaries got disillusioned with Gandhian techniques. The revolutionaries discarded the "Philosophy of non-violence as a philosophy arising out of despair."

Bhagat Singh played a dominant role in revolutionary activities in the post non-cooperation movement. Earlier he was drawn to Gandhi's peaceful movement when he got disturbed by the Jalianwala Bagh massacre. But due to the sudden cancellation of the movement after Chauri Chaura incident, he lost faith on Gandhi and his technique, alongwith other revolutionaries.



Inspiration :

Throughout his short life, Bhagat Singh emulated the examples of his ancestors. The generations of the Singh family i.e. Arjun Singh and his sons - Kishan Singh, Ajit Singh and Swaran Singh- had set an example for the service of the nation. After the occupation of Punjab by the British, a large part of the family's Jagir was confiscated. Bhagat Singh's ancestors were among those who were not reconciled to the foreign domination. Bhagat Singh's father was influenced by the Hindu reformist movement Arya Samaj. His uncles, Ajit Singh and Swaran Singh as well as his father were



part of the Ghadar party led by Kartar Singh Sarabha. Bhagat Singh was born in Lahore and it was in the city that the British launched the first Lahore conspiracy case in 1915, sentencing more than two dozen youths to death and hundreds of others to life imprisonment and other harsh jail sentences. Though the govt was able to crush the Ghadar Party revolutionaries through such brutal repression, their saga left an indelible impression on the minds of later generations of Indians. Those who went to the gallows in this case included Kartar Singh Sarabha, a youth of merely 16 years, whose image got etched in Bhagat Singh's psyche.

As for revolutionaries who were seriously disillusioned after the withdrawal of the Non-cooperation movement, then began to regroup all over north India. Sachindranath Sanyal formed the Hindustan Republican Association in 1924. Bhagat Singh and his friend in Lahore joined it.

This grouping soon led, in August 1925, to a train hold up at Kakori, a small station near Lucknow, where the Hindustan Republican association revolutionaries looted government money as a direct challenge to the British authority. In the Kakori conspiracy case, Ram Prasad Bismil and his three friends were hanged. The sacrifice of these great freedom fighters influenced Bhagat Singh immediately. September 8 and 9, 1928 was a milestone in the history of national revolutionary movement in India because of its momentous decision. First, the movement accepted socialism as its goal and, as its reflection, the Hindustan Republican Association was renamed as Hindustan Socialist Republican Association. Secondly, the meeting also realised the futility of individual violence and decided to abstain as far as possible, from killing British officials or approvers. Here Bhagat Singh was allowed to play a key role.

Dominant Ideas :

Bhagat Singh spent the years from 1924 to 1928 in studying the history of revolutionary

movement in India. Subsequently, he wrote articles in Kirti and Pratap. Moreover in the court on 6th June 1929, a full text of the statement of Bhagat Singh and B.K. Dutta was read by Asaf Ali.

Marxism :

Bhagat Singh's political thought evolved gradually from Gandhian nationalism to revolutionary Marxism. By the end of 1928 he and his comrades renamed their organisation the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association. He had read the teachings of Karl Marx, Friedrich Engles and Vladimirlenin and believed that with such large and diverse population, India could only survive properly under a socialist regime. These ideals had been introduced to him during his time at the National College at Lahore and he believed that India should reenact the Russian revolution. In the case that Indians were not socialist, he believed that the rich would only get richer and poor would only get poorer. His aggressive stance of violence, put him at odds with Gandhi and members of the congress. Socialist leaders sometimes refer back to him as the founder of Indian Socialism.

Atheism

While in a condemned cell in 1931, he wrote a pamphlet entitled 'why' I am an Atheist in which he discusses and advocates the philosophy of atheism. This pamphlet was a result of some criticism by fellow revolutionaries on his failure to acknowledge religion and God while in a condemned cell, the accusation of vanity was also dealt with in this pamphlet. He supported his own beliefs and claimed that he used to be a firm believer in the Almighty, but could not bring himself to believe the myths and beliefs that others held close to their hearts. In this Pamphlet, he acknowledged the fact that religion made death easier, but also said that unproved Philosophy is a sign of human weakness.



Anarchism :

Bhagat Singh's articles written in Kirti gives an idea about his leaning for anarchism. Proudhon is the father of Anarchism and Bakunin and Kropotkin are its other advocates. The ultimate goal of anarchism is complete independence, according to which, no one will be obsessed with Government or religion nor will any body be crazy for money or other worldly desires. Bhagat Singh being imbibed with these lofty ideals had made the supreme sacrifice.

Significant Actions :

In 1924, Bhagat Singh joined Hindustan Republican Association formed by Sachindranath Sanyal. Along with other members of the Association he joined Lala Lajpat Rai to protest the Simon Commission. In 1928 the London Commission constituted a commission under Sir John Simon to review the Mantagu Chelmsford reforms of 1919 and suggest constitutional changes for India. The Commission was not welcomed since it was a wholly British Commission. It was greeted by the people with the cries of "Simon go Back", 'Angrej Murdabad' "Down with the British" and Inquilab Zindabad. A slogan coined by Bhagat Singh to give a new edge, a new meaning to that of revolt. The crowd was also chanting a rhyme.

*Hindustani Hain hum, Hindustan Hamara
Murjao Simon, Jahan hai Desh Tumara*

Meaning : We are Indians and India is ours. Go back Simon to the country to which you belong.

In 1928 at Lahore, a great protest rally was organized. It was led by Bhagat Singh. In the protest when police resorted to brutal lathi charge, Lalaji got seriously injured and died. The members of the Association under the leadership of Bhagat Singh avenged Lalaji's death by assassinating J.P. Saunders, the police officer responsible for Lalaji's death.

As the next significant action by Hindustan Socialist Republican Party (the rechristened name of Hindustan Republican Party) Bhagat Singh and Batukeshwar Dutta threw bombs in the central Assembly on April 8, 1929, in protest against the Trade disputes Bill and Public safety Bill. Though for this action of their bravery they were punished deportation, Bhagat Singh had to sacrifice his life along with his other two comrades for the Lahore conspiracy case.

Modern Day Legacy

Bhagat Singh's death had the effect that he desired and he inspired thousands of youths to assist the reminder of the Indian Independence movement. After his hanging, youths in regions around Northern India rioted in protest against the British Raj and also against the indifference of the congress.

The Communist Party of India (Marxist) itself acknowledges Bhagat Singh's contribution to Indian society and in particular the future of socialism in India. To celebrate the centenary of his birth, a group of intellectuals have set up an institution to commemorate Singh and his ideals. Several popular Bollywood films have been made capturing the life and times of Bhagat Singh. The 2006 film "Rang De Basanti" is a film drawing parallels between revolutionaries of Bhagat Singh's era and modern Indian youth. Here it is apt to mention that through his organization *Naujawan Bharat Sabha* he trained the youths for fighting against the British Raj. He expected the youth to be courageous and brave and to work with a sense of patriotism which is lacking in modern day.

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